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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BAGHDAD 000807

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PINS](#) [KISL](#) [IZ](#)  
SUBJECT: SADR CITY OFFICIALS SAY MAHDI ARMY ACTIVITY IS ON  
THE RISE

Classified By: POLITICAL COUNSELOR ROBERT S. FORD FOR  
REASONS 1.4 (B) AND (D).

1. (C) Summary: In separate conversations, the Mayor of Sadr City 1, Sheikh Rahim Sahood, and Sadr City District Advisory Council (DAC) member Mustafa Jassim told PolOff that the Sadrism-backed Jaysh al-Mahdi (JAM) have been flexing their muscles in Sadr City. Sahood said, even though the Sadrists are not a majority of the Sadr City population, their supporters are very loyal and very vocal; as a result, they may come to completely dominate Sadr City politics. He added that, despite their violent behavior, many people in Sadr City view them as the only viable police force. To solve the problem, Jassim argued that JAM must be banned and the Iraqi Security Forces (ISF) strengthened. End Summary.

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Predictions of a Sadrism Takeover  
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2. (C) In a March 1 conversation with PolOff, Sheikh Rahim Sahood, Mayor of Sadr City 1, one of two administrative subdivisions in Sadr City, said the Sadrists are a minority in Sadr City, but were nonetheless very influential. The residents of Sadr City who support the Sadrists are very loyal to Muqtada al-Sadr, and fervently support him. Sahood argued that neither SCIRI nor Dawa could muster larger crowds than the Sadrists if they called for their followers to demonstrate in the streets; their supporters are not as fervent. He added that the political power of the Sadrists is growing at the expense of the other Shia political parties, especially after the attack on the Al Askariyah Shrine in Samarra. Sahood predicted that soon the Sadrists will effectively control all politics in Sadr City.

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Sadrists Abhor a Vacuum  
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3. (C) Sahood said that when the Mahdi Army (in Arabic, Jaysh al-Mahdi - JAM) began patrolling the streets of Sadr City after the February 22 bombing in Samarra, the Shia residents of Sadr City were not targets. JAM instead targeted Sunni Arabs and their mosques. Sahood added that many elements of JAM should be likened to criminal gangs that roam Sadr City. Iraqi Police are not capable of securing their battle space in Sadr City, he claimed, and so lawlessness prevails. JAM would like to fill this void, and so announced on Radio Sawa on March 2 that they would take over security for Sadr City.

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Killing to Protect  
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¶4. (C) Sadr City DAC member and Baghdad University Political Science professor Mustafa Jassim told PolOff in a March 6 conversation that he personally counted approximately 200 cars filled with JAM members on patrol in the Sadr City area on February 22, the day the Al Askariyah Shrine in Samarra was bombed. Since that attack, he estimated that between 10 and 13 people have been killed by the JAM each day in Sadr City. He claimed that their bodies had been dumped in the Sadr City landfill. Because JAM often acts as the only police force in Sadr City, however, some people sympathize with JAM and view the militia as protectors of the Shia, according to Jassim. Coalition Forces (CF), Jassim argued, are not visible in Sadr City, and so many Sadr City resident feel that CF does not care them. PolOff pushed back, reminding Jassim of the large CF presence throughout Iraq and the numerous reconstruction projects CF has undertaken in Sadr City and elsewhere.

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The Solution  
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¶5. (C) To solve this problem, Jassim urged CF to disarm JAM and strengthen the ISF. Only then can the ISF secure Sadr City, he said. After JAM is disarmed, he continued, the GOI could then address the unemployment problem that drives many young men to join militias such as JAM. Having a job, Jassim argued, gives a person a sense of identity and belonging. When a person lacks such feelings, they are more likely to join militias and armed gangs, he said.

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Comment  
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¶6. (C) Sahood's and Jassim's comments about Sadrist influence in Sadr City are plausible, but likely overly alarmist and seeking to unduly arouse Coalition attention. JAM elements were committing acts of violence before the Samarra bombing, but their actions spiked briefly after the bombing. It is unclear how much of this activity was actually from organized militia leadership and how much from rogue elements settling personal vendettas. Militia members, being already heavily armed and prone to violence, may have used the Golden Mosque bombing as an excuse to commit acts of violence against Sunnis they did not like. It appears they are capable of doing so again.  
KHALILZAD